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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 07 PRAGUE 000544

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SUBJECT: U.S.-CZECH POL-MIL TALKS A SUCCESS

REF: PRAGUE 473

Classified By: Acting DCM Michael Dodman for reasons
1.4 (b) & (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (S) The first joint State-DOD pol-mil talks with the Czech Republic took place in Prague on May 10. Discussions were productive and the mood positive. Highlights included:

-- GWOT AND CZECH OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENTS (paras 5-7): The Czechs intend to maintain their 100 military police presence in Iraq in 2007.

-- NATO/RIGA (paras 8-11): The Czechs share almost all of our major objectives for NATO reform and the Riga summit. MFA Political Director Martin Povejsil foresees the need for another Foreign Ministers' meeting before November and repeated a suggestion made at Sofia that members also meet at the Political Directors' level.

-- ESDP (paras 12-13): The GOCR confirmed their commitment to the primacy of NATO in all areas. However it was clear that 2009 will be a tough year for the Czechs to both field an EU battlegroup and be available to NATO.

-- PASSIVE SURVEILLANCE DETECTION SYSTEMS (paras 14-16): The Czechs reiterated their desire to work with the USG on cooperative technology ventures related to VERA. Amb Loftis conveyed our appreciation of the consultation process on VERA sales and our understanding of the 30-day window for a U.S. response (except in the case of US Military List) and the USG desire to prevent the proliferation of this technology to countries of concern. There was no specific discussion regarding potential sales from the Czechs or particular countries.

-- PROLIFERATION SECURITY INITIATIVE (para 21): The MFA outlined a suggestion for preparations for the PSI meeting in Warsaw that one European country (namely Poland) act as an information clearinghouse for PSI members. They would also like to propose a web-based information sharing system for PSI along the lines of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

-- GLOBAL PEACE OPERATIONS INITIATIVE: The Czechs noted that as a small country, they have to prioritize their contributions and Africa is lower on their list. However they expressed a desire to perhaps participate in other ways, such

as providing their experience/expertise with peacekeeping in the Balkans.

-- EXPORT CONTROLS: The Czechs warmly received the U.S. delegation's invitation to send a team to Washington to participate in a seminar hosted by USG agencies (DOD, State, Commerce).

-- VENEZUELA (paras 23): The GOCR reiterated that they share our commitment to preventing arms sales to Venezuela. The Czech MOD noted that the firm Calibrate is currently under criminal investigation relating to U.S.-provided information on arms production in Venezuela. They said they are unable to comment on the outcome of that investigation at this time. The MFA was more forthcoming, giving additional details and promising to follow-up.

End summary.

¶2. (U) The Czechs hosted the first bilateral pol-mil talks on May 10. Discussions took place at the MFA. PM Senior Advisor Ambassador Robert Loftis lead a USG delegation with participants from State (EUR, PM), OSD, EUCOM, J-5, and Embassy Prague (Pol-Econ, DAO, ODC). The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs team was lead by Security Policy Department Director Veronika Kuchynova-Smigolova. Defense Policy Director Radomir Jahoda led the Ministry of Defense team. MFA Political Director Martin Povejsil hosted a working lunch for the delegation and chaired a wide-ranging discussion.

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CZECH SECURITY POLICY:
PRINCIPLES AND PRAGMATISM

¶3. (C) MFA Security Policy Department Director Veronika Kuchynova Smigolova opened the talks by observing the United States and the Czech Republic share the same goals. A united Europe and a strong Euro-Atlantic alliance are the core priorities of Czech Foreign Policy. As a matter of principle, the Czech Republic will always prefer the resolution of disputes by diplomatic means. However, if such measures were to fail, the Czech Republic would always be prepared to act to protect its interests in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter. The GOCR believes that UN Security Council Resolutions are not necessary to allow a country to defend its vital interests. Smigolova expects the GOCR to initiate a redrafting of the Czech Republic's 2003 Security Strategy following the June 2-3 elections but expects that little will change in tone or content. Smigolova outlined Czech foreign security policy focus as the Czech Republic's neighbors (i.e., the Balkans), followed by the Middle East and Afghanistan. Czech interests in Africa are less of a priority. Accordingly, any future Czech personnel deployments to Africa are more likely to be with international organizations.

¶4. (C) MOD Defense Policy Director Jahoda said the Czechs view NATO as the main provider of security, but also see the EU as assuring security. Jahoda outlined the main tasks of the Czech Armed Forces: (1) defend the Czech Republic; (2) meet NATO and EU obligations, and (3) engage in NATO, EU, and "joint" operations.

GWOT AND CZECH OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENTS

¶5. (C) Ambassador Loftis commended the Czech Republic for its contributions in the fight against terrorism in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the significant stabilization work being done by Czech troops in the Balkans. He shared current U.S. thinking on the necessity for a substantial civilian component as a part of an effective strategy for combating counterinsurgencies (Note: this prompted several welcoming

nods from MOD officials who have previously shared their frustrations at getting other ministries to commit civilian personnel to Czech deployments in places like Afghanistan. End note). Smigolova believes the gradual transfer of operations in Afghanistan to ISAF is the appropriate strategy. While the crucial security situation had not improved, she hoped the Afghan Government could slowly reassert control over the entire country.

¶6. (C) Smigolova predicted the Czech Republic's current contribution of 100 MPs for training Iraqi forces would continue in 2007. The Parliament is likely to approve an extension of the deployment, though for political reasons, language referring to a possible eventual transfer of command to the NATO structure would have to be retained. Ambassador Loftis underscored the importance of early discussions with the United States should the Czech Republic ever consider to withdraw from any of its troop commitments in support of the fight against terrorism. The U.S. goal is to have a controlled transition in Iraq, in coordination with all of our allies. Both Smigolova and Jahoda made a similar request, asking for early U.S. information-sharing and consultations on any exit being considered by Coalition partners. As a small country, the Czechs are particularly vulnerable to problems stemming from changes in the deployments of allies, particularly ones that provide the Czech Republic with logistical and other support.

¶7. (C) Ambassador Jozef Braun, the MFA Coordinator for Counterterrorism, briefed the group on his newly-created position, and conveyed his hope that he would be able to foster flexible and effective communication structures within the GOCR to facilitate the fight against terrorism. Smigolova shared her belief that intelligence exchange within NATO is not working well. She suggested increased bilateral intelligence-sharing, in addition to efforts to improve intelligence structures at NATO. OSD Principal Director for

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European and NATO Policy James Townsend agreed that information and intelligence sharing are issues commonly heard among the Allies. While he acknowledged there is much work to be done to address these issues, he was encouraged by the progress that has been made over the past few years. He told the Czech representatives that battlefield intelligence sharing among deployed coalition or Allied forces is a high priority for the U.S. and invited them to raise any specific problems in this arena for our review.

NATO: RIGA SUMMIT; ENLARGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

¶8. (C) Smigolova looked forward to the Riga summit as an opportunity for the alliance, and repeated a suggestion made by the Czechs at Sofia that members also meet at the Political Directors level to carry the goodwill of leadership meetings into the working levels of the ministries.

¶9. (C) Smigolova listed two priorities for the Czech Republic in the area of NATO enlargement: (1) Democratization and laws should be considered a more important criterion than military capacity when considering the admission of new members (i.e. Ukraine and Georgia); (2) NATO enlargement should not weaken the alliance by diluting members, Article 5 obligations. Smigolova drew the conclusion that before the next round of talks on NATO enlargement, the alliance would need to have an internal strategic discussion about whether to concentrate on collective defense or security cooperation. Smigolova also cautioned about the possible need for a Riga communique on NATO enlargement, to avoid a public perception after the summit that little had been achieved.

10 (C) Smigolova commented on the inconsistencies in NATO association agreements, saying it was sometimes difficult to explain in the Balkans how countries such as Belarus could be PFP members. She cautioned about the possible negative reaction in Belgrade if future applications from Montenegro

or Kosovo were approved before Serbia, which had been waiting for a long time. (Note: The policy of the Czech Government remains that Belgrade must cooperate with ICTY before further international linkages can be made. End note). Smigolova said the Ukrainian elections had been a good signal, but she saw a need to clarify if Ukraine actually wanted to join NATO, or if it just saw NATO as a necessary step for joining the EU. She thought that NATO could discuss a Membership Action Plan for Ukraine in 2008 but not full membership. Smigolova said transformation in Georgia was slower than had been hoped, but believed that Georgia should be granted an intensified dialogue when NATO deemed it ready. She praised the U.S. paper on partnerships and recommended that partnership initiatives should be concentrated on countries with shared values. Ambassador Loftis highlighted the U.S. view that, in the context of NATO, shared values also means shared obligations. He noted the United States might place even greater emphasis on military capacity when making membership decisions. The Czech side remarked that NATO needs to review the Strategic Concept as it considered the next round of enlargement, so that Allies had a better understanding of the scope and the goals of the Alliance we are enlarging. Townsend acknowledged the need to look carefully at NATO's strategic concept, which had not been updated since 1999; however, he said such a review should not take place now, but in a few years

¶11. (C) MFA Political Director Povejsil shared his view that another Foreign Ministers, meeting in advance of the Riga summit would be worthwhile. Povejsil supported the idea that the Riga summit use the examples of the NRF and the ISAF presence in Afghanistan as examples of how the alliance has been transformed. He also questioned the utility of the formal ongoing NATO reform initiative. In response, Townsend warned of the risk of military transformation at NATO and in Allied nations shuddering to a halt if pressure to reform was not maintained.

NATO: RELATIONSHIP TO ESDP

¶12. (C) Political Director Povesil explained that the Czechs
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view NATO as the prime pillar of security in Europe, and they approach the ESDP agenda from that point of view. He said the Czech Republic, as a small nation, could not afford to have double sets of forces to meet obligations under both systems. He said the EU was engaged in ongoing "theological" discussions, with some members clearly in favor of developing an available alternate force. He saw the need for more lower-level meetings with no fixed agendas as a possible mechanism to break deadlocks on the role of ESDP vis-a-vis NATO. Povejsil said that, contrary to the global ambitions of at least on EU member, the Czech Republic was trying to focus ESDP on EU defense, the Balkans, and the Middle East, in that order. He said the EU still had to learn to act together in relation to its immediate neighbors, giving the recent history of the Balkans as an example of how EU division delayed effective action.

¶13. (C) Smigolova underscored that NATO is the cornerstone of Europe's security and that ESDP, while important, must supplement NATO capacities. Forces must not be double-tasked under competing structures. She shared that the EU is not united on the correct approach to ESDP. Some members want to accelerate the project, while many members, including most of the new members, prefer a path more consistent with the Qansatlantic security relationship.

PASSIVE SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS (VERA-E)

¶14. (C) In a surprisingly brief session, GOCR representatives took a cooperative and positive tone on VERA. The Czechs thanked the United States for SECDEF Rumsfeld's letter on the successful results of U.S. testing of the VERA-E, which

demonstrated that the systems was as effective as claimed by the manufacturer.

¶15. (S) Ambassador Loftis thanked the Czechs for consulting with the United States before transferring the technology to others. He recognized that the GOCR is bound by its law to respond to license requests within 30 days, and promised the USG would do try to work as &expeditiously as possible8 with that timeframe in mind. However, he warned that the USG might not always be able to meet the 30-day deadline because of the need to comply with U.S. law covering VERA components of U.S.-origin.

¶16. (S) Jahoda said the Czechs remain committed to bilateral agreement to consult with USG before transfer of the technology to others. The Czech delegation welcomed the possibility of U.S. interest in joint research and development efforts, whether government-to-government or business-to-business. Ambassador Loftis indicated the first step towards such cooperation would involve the appropriate preliminary framework to allow such cooperation to begin. Embassy Prague,s Office of Defense Cooperation will take the lead in working with the GOCR to explore this initiative.

U.S. GLOBAL DEFENSE POSTURE REALIGNMENT

¶17. (C) Explaining the U.S. Global Defense Posture Realignment, Ambassador Loftis assured the Czechs that the process should not be interpreted as a diminished commitment to Europe. Cooperation with allies would be even more important, especially when exercising the mobility necessary to deploy troops to meet new challenges. After receiving a EUCOM briefing on the implications for U.S. forces in Europe, Smigolova said the Czech Republic highly appreciates the U.S. presence in Europe, in both the political and military contexts. SheQoted the Czech Republic,s ongoing interest in air policing policy, and said that this concern had been the driving force behind the Czech Republic,s decision to lease Gripen fighter aircraft. Smigolova also underlined the Czech Republic,s position that a U.S. presence in the Balkans was crucial and hoped the U.S. commitment to the region would not diminish. Ambassador Loftis confirmed the United States recognizes the importance of the area itself and its significance for the stability of Europe. Townsend shared that the U.S. would have to look closely at its force commitments to the region after the conclusion of the final

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status talks for Kosovo.

PRT IN AFGHANISTAN

¶18. (C) Ambassador Loftis queried the Czech side about the Czech Republic,s idea to possibly lead a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan. Smigolova responded that the financial aspects of such a deployment were proving difficult and the Czech Republic might need support from allies. The current parliamentary mandate would allow for the Czechs to lead a PRT under ISAF. Czech MOD representatives warmly welcomed the U.S. observation that civilian components of PRTs in Afghanistan were crucial.

CZECH DEFENSE PLANNING (INCLUDING AIRLIFT)

¶19. (C) Jahoda said the Czech goal for transformation is to develop "small, young, modern, and mobile" armed forces. The ceiling for the total number of deployable Czech troops is likely to increase from 1,000-1,250 to 1,500 troops as part of the ongoing defense reform effort. The armed forces plan to reach "initial" operational capability by the start of 2007 ("initial" means that some but not all troops would be fully operational). Full operational capability would be

reached by 2011-2012. However, Jahoda lamented that shortfalls in funding are proving to be a challenge to the reform effort. The 2006 budget puts the defense ministry at just 1.76 percent of GDP (55 billion crowns or USD 2.2 billion) and Jahoda stated this was insufficient. He predicted defense spending in 2007 would be 1.68 percent of GDP. Jahoda noted the Czech Republic still had to fully address the financial aspects of the EU Battlegroup that the Czechs have promised to field in 2009. Jahoda said Czech commitments to both NATO and EU commitments would be met by careful scheduling. EU Battlegroup troops would be trained to operate at NRF standards. In response to U.S. questions and concerns about "double hatting," MOD officials explained that the preparations for the EU Battlegroup would increase the total pool of Czech troops which had been trained to the requisite standard. These troops would be available for NRF duty in the future. The Czechs did not provide a convincing answer to a U.S. question about diminished availability of Czech personnel for the NRF if soldiers were returning from EU missions.

¶20. (C) Jahoda acknowledged the Czech Republic suffers from an airlift deficit. Jahoda raised the idea of further NATO common funding. However, he cautioned the Czech Republic did not want common funding on all activities, and noted that not all member states of NATO would be open to the idea of common funding for airlift. Principal Director Townsend reviewed the idea of a consortium purchase of C-17s to help meet both national and NATO strategic lift shortfalls. The Czech side seemed unaware of the proposal and was urged by the US side to engage their NATO delegation with Assistant Secretary General for Defense Investment Marshall Billingsly, who could provide further information.

PROLIFERATION SECURITY INITIATIVE

¶21. (C) Pavel Klucky, Head of the MFA's Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Unit, offered two suggestions to improve the functioning of the PSI. He believed that effectiveness could be enhanced by the designation of a member-state as a "point of contact" for future PSI meetings, which would ensure preparatory documents made it to all of the meetings participants when they were circulated for comment. Klucky suggested that Poland would be the appropriate choice for preparations for the PSI meeting in Warsaw. Klucky's second idea was for an internet-based information sharing system for PSI along the lines of that employed by the Nuclear Suppliers Group. He noted that the NSG password-based system was based on U.S. technology, and that the support of the U.S. would be crucial in setting up a similar system for PSI. Ambassador Loftis responded that Washington would examine these proposals and respond. Ambassador Loftis also thanked the

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Czechs for their excellent ongoing engagement in PSI, including their co-hosting of the 2005 Bohemian Guard exercise.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMBINED US-CZECH MILITARY TRAINING

¶22. (C) In the interests of time, discussion of combined training was largely deferred until the May 17 visit of COL Thomas Vandal, Commander Operations Group JMRC Hohenfels, who would work with the Czech Republic to explain U.S. training priorities and to examine concrete opportunities for training exercises between the Czech and U.S. forces.

VENEZUELA

¶23. (C) Ambassador Loftis thanked Czechs for their restrictions on arms sales to Venezuela and urged them to persuade their EU colleagues to adopt a similar position.

Thanks to a USG tip-off, the Czech police are now investigating the activities of Calibrate, a Czech company that allegedly has an agreement with a Venezuelan company to manufacture pistols. The activity is unauthorized by the Czech government and presumably illegal. The MFA representative for arms licensing promised to keep the Embassy informed of the status of the investigation.

END-USE MONITORING SEMINAR

¶24. (U) Ambassador Loftis formally invited the Czechs to send a team to Washington to attend a seminar with USG officials tailored to explain U.S. end-use monitoring for export controls. The Czech delegation welcomed this initiative and informally expressed their interest in participating. The Embassy will seek a formal reply from the GOCR.

MISSILE DEFENSE

¶25. (C) Due to Czech MOD political concerns in advance of the June 2-3 parliamentary elections the issue of missile defense basing was not raised at these talks. MOD representatives continued to privately predict the Czech Republic will seek to participate in missile defense once the election has passed. They maintain the divisive issue is the election itself rather than missile defense.

COMMENT

¶26. (C) The positive and open mood of the talks reflected the state of our overall bilateral relationship. The Czechs will continue to embrace the transatlantic security relationship and to ensure its promotion within Europe. It appears that the GOCR was unwilling to change the collaborative atmosphere of the talks by talking tough on the VERA issue. The new U.S. ideas on closer cooperation between the U.S. and the Czech Republic are likely to assist in maintaining the consultative relationship we currently enjoy with many parts of the GOCR on VERA. However, the true test will come the next time the GOCR asks the United States for an opinion on a real-world VERA sale. Prompt response times will be crucial to demonstrate the new level of commitment from the U.S. side.

¶27. (C) Bilateral relations are strong, but the Czech parliament remains more open to approving expeditionary deployments when they are done under the auspices of a multilateral structure. Several times during the talks, Smigolova mentioned that while the GOCR would be ready to deploy troops as part of future ad-hoc coalitions, it would be easier to get the parliament to authorize expeditionary operations in support of operations under alliance structures.

¶28. (U) This cable has been cleared by Ambassador Loftis and

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Mr. Townsend.

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